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Amanda Alcox

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Feminist Anthems: A Musical Journey Through the Decades  
Amanda Alcox  
Merrimack College  
Professor Debra Michals

**Introduction:**

Every United States citizen knows, or should know, the national anthem of America. This anthem symbolizes praise, devotion, and patriotism. Anthems can also symbolize loyalty to a nation, or even a college. For example, if you have attended a West Virginia University football game, you would have definitely heard the song, *Take Me Home, Country Roads* by John Denver. According to the University's athletic fight songs and chants page, this song has been performed at every home football pre-game show since 1972. Furthermore, this song is played after every victory at the home stadium and fans are encouraged to stay in the stands and to sing along with fellow fans and the team. The athletic page also shared that the song's artist, John Denver, christened the new stadium when he performed this song during the pre-game before the home team took on Cincinnati in their 1980 season opening game (West Virginia University Athletics, 2019). Individuals who are familiar with West Virginia University game days may consider this song as an anthem to their college, similarly, and in addition to, how other colleges pay patronage to the national anthem on their game days, too.

Sports aside, there are other events where anthems are prevalent. Anthems not only appeal to colleges or nations, but groups of people, too. National Public Radio (NPR) journalist Stephen Thompson (2014) accurately expressed that anthems bring together people or groups with similar past experiences. Anthems can also symbolize a certain year, era, or movement, like the Women's March with the song "Quiet" by MILCK. In fact, "Quiet" falls under the feminist anthem category and will be explained later in this paper. Overall, a true anthem will make a listener want to stand on a rooftop and scream out loud the lyrics for the whole world to hear as a means to express one's experience that was creatively and beautifully written in lyrics.

Anthems can also speak to targeted groups of individuals, for example, feminists, disabled persons, racial groups, etc. One example of an anthem that appeals to many other groups is the song, “Let it Go,” by the character Elsa in Disney’s Frozen. In an article for NPR, Joseph Shapiro (2019) thoughtfully shared that groups such as LGBTQ+ persons, disabled persons, people in prisons, people with eating disorders, and people with addiction identified with Elsa, a queen who learned to shed her shame and accept the things that make her different. This song started at the point in the movie where Elsa’s dark secret was discovered. This revelation forced Elsa into isolation, a feeling felt by many marginalized groups when others find out something personal about themselves. Elsa showed actions such as hiding and cutting out people whom she loves, and also holding inside a secret for so long that eventually it busted out of her. Shapiro (2019) argued that “Let It Go” is the moment when Elsa begins to stop holding herself to someone else’s idea of perfect. So, how can this apply to other groups? Young girls can listen to this song and think to themselves, “I don’t need materialistic items or cosmetics to be beautiful, I am beautiful,” or students could think to themselves, “It isn’t the end of the world if I don’t get an A+ on everything, I am the best I can be,” or even people in the prison who could say, “I made a mistake and I am serving the time, but I will not let this action define me for the rest of my life. I can learn from my past mistakes and move on.” As noted above, “Let It Go” can serve as a feminist anthem for girls and women across the world with its message to undeniably and confidently love themselves. Overall, “Let It Go” served as a powerful song and fortunately attracted people of all ages, both young and old, and sent strong and empowering messages to numerous groups.

Feminist anthems will be the focal point of this paper. Unlike a standard anthem, feminist anthems cover topics such as sexual assault awareness, sexual harassment in the workplace,

sexual freedom as a woman, strength and courage as a woman, independence from a bad marriage, and so much more. These five previously listed topics will be analyzed throughout this paper. Feminist anthems can bring together women, and allied men, who have witnessed oppression first-hand. The listeners to these songs will want to join hands and sing and feel the lyrics by the artist. Each song will bring the listener on a journey that will allow for reflection and unity. The listeners will hear a voice that has been inside them for so long, but possibly too frightened to speak out on their own.

Ron Eyerman published his own thoughts on feminism and music as a social movement. He has attributed the following functions to music in social movements: “It can articulate and foster a sense of group belonging; make the group visible to others; assist in recruitment to the cause; create a sense of continuity; and ‘permit the presentation of the collective’s view of events free from the censorship of the dominant culture’” (Eyerman, 2002, 447 as cited in Arrow, 2007). Michelle Arrow (2007) relevantly wrote, “Eyerman argues that music fostered the mobilization of younger people in the American Civil Rights movement and played a vital part in demonstrations. In its more radical Black Power phase, music and popular culture effectively ‘took over’ as a means of fusing and articulating the movement (Eyerman, 2002, 456 as cited in Arrow, 2007). Overall, the art of feminist music articulates feminist consciousness both in its organization and sentiments. As Arrow points out, and as this paper will discuss, music is stored in the body, and the act of singing is a form of consciousness raising. This paper will analyze the lyrics and messages of the five following songs: “Quiet” by MILCK, “9 to 5” by Dolly Parton, “The Pill” by Loretta Lynn, “I Am Woman” by Helen Reddy, and “Sam Jones Blues” by Bessie Smith.

**1923 Feminist Anthem: “Sam Jones Blues” by Bessie Smith**

Feminist anthems can be traced back decades. To begin this journey, we will start with the earliest decade of our five songs, “Sam Jones Blues” by Bessie Smith. This paper is set-up this way to show where feminist artists and feminist anthems have started, where they have gone, and where they will continue to go. Although the 1920s decade is far back into U.S. women’s history, there are indeed some feminist anthems. The genre of “Sam Jones Blues” is blues and the lyrics speak on behalf of a wife who frees herself from a bad marriage as she asserts her independence. The song’s chorus sings, *“I’m free and livin’ all alone. Don’t need your clothes, don’t need your rent. Don’t need your ones and twos. Though I ain’t rich, I know my stitch. I earned my strutting shoes. Say, hand me the key that unlocks my front door. Because that bell don’t read Sam Jones no more, no. You ain’t talkin’ to Mrs. Jones. You speakin’ to Miss Wilson now”* (Sam Jones Blues, 1923). Academic scholar and activist, Angela Davis (1998), intelligently acknowledged that the blues genre was a predominant post-slavery African-American music form. The blues help artists articulate a new valuation of individual emotional needs and desires. In this era, female blues singers performed as professional artists and attracted large audiences. Two widely-known female blues singers were Gertrude “Ma” Rainey and Bessie Smith. These two women both sang and preached about sexual love. In doing so, they presented detailed experiences of freedom and gave voice to the most powerful notion that slavery was over (Davis, 1998).

Within blues music, the focus on sexual love differs in meaning compared to the ideals of romantic love shown in mainstream popular music. According to Davis (1998), freely chosen sexual love, particularly for recently emancipated slaves, became a mediator between historical disappointment and the new social realities of an evolving African-American community. Davis

(1998) further explained that the representation of love and sexuality in blues music sung by women often contradicted the mainstream ideological assumptions that regarded women and the state of being in love. Additionally, they contradicted and challenged the idea that a woman's place was in the domestic sphere. This all led to overarching contradictions between prevailing social expectations and black women's social realities in the nation. The female songwriters recognized that the women in this era were expected to find happiness and satisfaction through their marriages, and through their husbands who served as the provider to the family. There was a noticeable lack of allusions to marriage and domesticity in women's blues songs, and it became highly significant (Davis, 1998).

Bessie Smith's rendition of "Sam Jones Blues" was one of the few songs to include marital commentary. However, the subject of marriage was only acknowledged in relation to its dissolution. Angela Davis (1998) rightfully believed that Bessie Smith's performance satirically accentuated the contrast between the dominant cultural construction of marriage as well as the stance of economic independence that Black women were compelled to assume for their survival. Black studies scholar, Daphne Duval Harrison, listed the following as themes for blues women artists: "advice to other women; alcohol; betrayal or abandonment; broken or failed love affairs; death: departure; dilemma of staying with man or returning to family; disease and afflictions; erotica; hell; homosexuality; infidelity; injustice; jail and serving time; loss of lover; love; men; mistreatment: murder; other woman; poverty; promiscuity; sadness; sex; suicide; supernatural; trains; traveling: unfaithfulness; vengeance; weariness, depression. and disillusionment; weight loss" (Daphne Duval Harrison as cited in Davis, 1998). Children, domestic life, husbands, and marriages are unpopular themes.

Overall, Bessie Smith's performance of "Sam Jones Blues" showed great empowerment for the African American community as well as strong empowerment for the women in this era who were encouraged to recognize their own worth and their independence from societal ideals. In the early 1900s and prior, women were seen as inferior to their husbands and needed to be married for a sense of high status and financial security. Bessie Smith's message was impressive for its time as women were consistently in the role as the housewives who would obey their husbands. In fact, marital rape was not illegal until the late 1900s. Thus, Bessie Smith had a lot of bravery and courage to release a song that accepted and encouraged women to leave the private sphere and into the public sphere to provide and defend themselves.

### **1975 Feminist Anthem: "The Pill" by Loretta Lynn**

The 1970s were noticeably progressive for women in the United States, and women were starting to be taken more seriously in society. In fact, according to Napikoski (2019), San Diego State University created and started its first Women's Studies Department and Cornell University shortly followed that lead and created a Women's Studies program in that same year, too. Some of the feminist themes that were being sung about in the 1970s were independent sexual freedom and individual strength and triumphs from women across the nation. Two notable feminist anthems from the 1970s are "The Pill" by Loretta Lynn and "I Am Woman" by Helen Reddy. These two songs are considered feminist anthems as their messages tied into feminist movements and protests during their time as well as left listeners with messages of female empowerment.

Loretta Lynn's song, "The Pill," strongly saluted to the creation of the birth control pill. As a result of the birth control pill, women gained a strong sense of sexual freedom with their partners and felt safe and protected on their own. The birth control pill was created by Dr. Gregory Goodwin Pincus and Margaret Sanger, a notable woman in women's history, who coined the



term “birth control.” Sanger believed that women should have the right to not have so many babies. She wanted to legalize the dissemination of contraceptives and she concentrated on helping poor women to control their fertility (Dubois and Dumenil, 2016, p. 482). Prior to the pill, many women would try to prevent pregnancy through the “rhythm method,” or the “safe period,” which were methods allowed by the Roman Catholic Church but were found to be extremely unsuccessful. So, with the birth control pill, this protected many unmarried women from becoming pregnant and receiving social shame and familial rejection.

The creation of the birth control pill promoted equality for women and allowed for women to be economically self-sustained units. Now, women could go to work, go to college, and maintain their own income. Loretta Lynn sang the lyrics, *“All these years I’ve stayed at home while you had all your fun and every year that’s gone by, another baby’s come. There’s gonna be some changes made right here on nursery hill. You set this chicken your last time cause now I’ve got the pill”* (Allen, L., McHan, D., Bayless, T., & Lynn, L., 1972). If the birth control pill was never created, a woman’s sexual freedom would be limited. Furthermore, there would be a constant fear and uncertainty whether they would get pregnant after unprotected sex. And, if the woman did get pregnant, then more often than not the woman would be in charge of staying home to care for the baby, rather than the baby’s father, which would limit the mother’s ability to get an education or get a job in the workforce. And lastly, without the birth control pill, our nation’s women might still be told to not ask the man to wear a condom simply because she was lucky that he chose her. That was a mentality that needed to be erased from all people’s minds.

“The Pill” by Loretta Lynn is a noteworthy feminist anthem because it spoke about a trend that did not seem to fit the social norm quite yet. In the mid-to-late 1900s, most, if not all, unmarried women presented themselves as virgins on the outside and in public; however, at

home and in private, many unmarried women were not virgins. At first, getting the pill may have been out of many people's comfort zones, especially if they were unmarried. But, Loretta Lynn's song normalized the usage of the birth control pill and the song was radical because it spread the message that women are, in fact, using the birth control pill and women are now feeling freer than ever to engage in sex on their own terms.

In the 1970s, there was a lot of talk about sex and abortions in society; however, it was an uncomfortable subject for many to discuss. During the time of Loretta Lynn's song, there were monumental strides in the pro-choice feminist movement. For example, on January 22, 1973, *Roe v. Wade* was decided and legalized first-trimester abortion. Additionally, the Supreme Court case, *Planned Parenthood v. Danforth*, struck down the requirement for written spousal consent before a woman could obtain an abortion (Napikoski, 2019). These landmark cases justified Loretta Lynn's song and messages that women are gaining independence over their bodies and that things are about to change in society. As a feminist anthem, Lynn's lyrics shed light onto the progressions in society for women and gave it a platform for all to hear, both in their homes and in public.

### **1971 Feminist Anthem: "I Am Woman" by Helen Reddy**

A second song from the 1970s is Helen Reddy's "I Am Woman." This song was released in 1971. Reddy famously sings the lyrics, "*Oh yes, I am wise, but it's wisdom born of pain. Yes, I've paid the price, but look how much I gained. If I have to, I can do anything. I am strong. I am invincible. I am woman*" (Burton, 1972). Those three short and sweet sentences at the end of the chorus served as a powerful tactic. This song could be on the radio, in the grocery store, or anywhere, but regardless, people, whether they were actively listening or not, would hear the words, "I am strong. I am invincible. I am woman." And, most importantly, these words would

play over and over in the minds of people across the world. This feminist anthem appealed to housewives across the United States and cheered them up. As fitting for a feminist anthem, the song promoted unity and encouraged women to get up and dance and to join hands in song.

Secondly, the message that women have paid the price but have gained a lot is another reason why Helen Reddy's song is a feminist anthem. Throughout the 1970s, women were able to recognize all of the things they did not have until they received it. For example, in 1971 the Supreme Court declared sex discrimination a violation of the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment in the case called *Reed v. Reed*, and in 1972, *Ms. Magazine* published its first issue. *Ms. Magazine* was a part of the Second-Wave feminist movement, a movement that was driven toward fighting against social norms as well as family-life norms, too. And finally, in 1979 a historic woman received the recognition she deserved as the first Susan B. Anthony dollar coin was minted. Slowly but surely, women were starting to win court cases and see identifiable faces on magazines, money, and much more.

Michelle Arrow (2007) wrote that "I Am Woman" was the theme song for International Women's Year in 1975. This was a huge accomplishment for the Australian born superstar. Over the years, Reddy has received positive feedback for her lyrics in the song. Arrow (2007) wrote, "First, 'I Am Woman' translated, in very simple terms, the ideals of feminism for women who were not necessarily part of the women's movement and was a source of inspiration. Second, the song was a way of articulating protest against oppression or patriarchal control in women's own lives. Finally, the song is often invoked as a turning point in life narratives that chart a growth of feminist consciousness, one of those 'lightbulb' moments observed above" (p. 223). Testimonies in Arrow (2003) shared that women would sing the song during their failing marriages. Commenters in Michelle Arrow's article also proudly said that they sang the song to their

children and grandchildren. One commented that their father hated the song and it must have been because he saw how much strength it gave the commenter. One vowed that because of the song and its powerful messages, she would do as she pleased and would never take order from men. One commenter, Joan, said, “It was like a heartbeat to me. [...] it gave us a voice to change things. [...] The song changed the way I thought about myself. It put into words what I subconsciously felt, [that] women were powerful” (Joan, 2006 as cited in Arrow, 2007, p. 225).

To conclude, a final powerful testimony in Arrow (2003) came from Hannah, a commenter in the article. She stated, “The song gave me strength. I played it over and over, before going out into the fray, out into the business world where I had to deal with being a second-class citizen. It also helped alter my ideas of ‘love.’ I had ‘wisdom born of pain’, I had been ‘down there on the floor’ and as sure as eggs, no-one would ever ‘keep me down again.’ That song changed my life. If you are in touch with Helen Reddy, by any chance, please pass on my heartfelt thanks (Hannah, 2006). “I Am Woman” can be seen as a feminist anthem for the reason that it changes lives. The lyrics and the messages give women strength and reassurance that being a strong and powerful woman is not just a far stretched ideal in their own minds.

### **1980 Feminist Anthem: “9 to 5” by Dolly Parton**

In the 1980s, there was still a lot of progress for women’s rights; however, female employment in the workplace was far from equal. One feminist anthem that accurately depicted the struggles of women in the workplace is “9 to 5” by Dolly Parton. In fact, this song served as an integral part of the major motion picture “9 to 5” directed by Colin Higgins in 1980. Dolly Parton played a character who had a main role in this film, too. In brief, the film followed three female employees during the 1980s. The film demonstrated how the male boss, Hart, exploited and mistreated his female subordinates. He used sexist remarks, took credit for the females’

ideas, yelled and threatened to fire his employees, and sexually harassed one of his female employees, too (Higgins, 1980). “9 to 5” is a feminist anthem because it told the story of women’s daily lives in the workplace as it related to major movements and protests occurring in the late 1970s and early 1980s. The lyrics and messages were identifiable and relatable to many female workers, and the messages made their way to the ears and minds of male workers, too, which ideally made them aware of their female counterparts’ daily struggles.

As Rebecca Traister openly noted in a *New Republic* article, “9 to 5” was an immediate feminist anthem for her and her female friends. She wrote, “When I was in my twenties and worked as a secretary—a job that had then recently been rebranded “assistant”—my female colleagues and I used to go out drinking at a dive bar with a jukebox that was heavily stocked with country music. Just about every week, we women—overworked, underpaid, and thoroughly fried by our comparatively cushy yet still pretty thankless jobs—would end the night practically standing on the bar for one song: Dolly Parton’s “9 to 5” (Traister, 2015). As mentioned in the introduction, anthems have a way to bring people together who share similar backgrounds, struggles, and triumphs. Like the personal testimony in Traister’s article, in 1977 women came together with the organization, Women Employed, and held a protest to support Iris Rivera, a legal secretary who was fired for not making coffee in her office (Napikoski, 2019). Dolly Parton’s song reflected these types of movements and publicly shined light that sexual harassment in the workplace was a real issue that many women faced in the United States.

In her article, Traister explained the history to this iconic song, too. First, she mentioned Second-Wave feminism. She believed that this played a large role in the song as the movement encouraged numerous white, middle-class women to enter into the paid workforce as well as encouraged many of these women to leave the marriages they entered during the ‘Baby

Booming' 1950s and 1960s (Traister, 2015). Traister recognized that the affiliated film, "9 to 5," was based on experiences by members of the 9 to 5 National Association of Working Women. This organization was founded by Karen Nussbaum and Ellen Bravo, both work-life balance advocates, in 1973. Traister also emphasized that the working conditions mentioned in both the song and the film have deep roots in the American culture. The culture in our society rationalizes higher pay for men as women, assumingly, do not provide financial support to their families. Another issue in our culture, both past and present, is sexual harassment as a legal issue. The movie and film recognized that sexual harassment is not the way things are or should be. Traister highlighted that this notion was not in the minds of the American people until eleven years after the film when Anita Hill testified at Clarence Thomas's Supreme Court confirmation hearings (Traister, 2015).

A notable lyric in Dolly Parton's Grammy award-winning song sings, "*It's a rich man's game, no matter what they call it, and you spend your life putting money in his pocket*" (Parton, 1980). A well-known struggle for female employees with male supervisors was that their ideas were taken without receiving any credit. While the boss attended meetings and provided great ideas that were often from the female employees, they would get the praise, and maybe even a raise. However, the women were left with no compensation for their ideas. The song also says, "*They let you dream just to watch them shatter*" (Parton, 1980). Women in the workplace would be manipulated by their boss and their supervisor to do certain acts, whether they wanted to or not. They were threatened that if they did not do what they were told, then they would never rise up and get a promotion of any kind. However, even after the task was completed, there was no guarantee that the male boss would stay true to his word and provide a promotion. Women would work fiercely and tirelessly to please their boss with the slight hope of a better tomorrow.

Unfortunately, more often than not, the women's hopes would be let down and they would continue to do more work for less pay. To conclude, women in today's society continue to struggle with the pay gap and sexual harassment in the workplace. So, sadly, this song remains relevant to a number of American women and will continue to serve as an anthem until gender equality in the workplace is achieved.

### **2015 Feminist Anthem: "Quiet" by MILCK**

Last but not least, MILCK came out with a song titled "Quiet" in 2015. Ironically, this song was released months before Harvey Weinstein's name was plastered across new channels and the #MeToo movement went into full force. The song went viral overnight and stood as a feminist anthem for any, and all, victims of sexual harassment and abuse. The words in the song, *"I can't keep quiet for anyone anymore,"* spoke to a lot of women across the nation. The artist, Connie Lim (MILCK), stated that she viewed this song as her own personal therapy that helped her cope with her traumatic teenage experiences as a sexual assault and abuse victim (Blair, 2019). A strong turning point in Lim's life, as well as the song's mission, was the 2016 presidential election. As strongly quoted in an NPR article written by Elizabeth Blair, Lim stated, "The rhetoric that was used to describe women really enraged me, and just kind of brought me back to those feelings of when I was younger ... I was told I needed to 'sit properly,' and I need to 'speak less' and 'smile more' and 'lose weight' and just be this perfect little girl" (Lim as quoted in Blair, 2019). Lim felt a sense of duty and urgency to share her song and its message with the world, especially American women. Instead of dwelling on rage, Lim turned her energy into an idea to teach her song to other singers and to perform it at the Women's March in Washington, D.C., coincidentally, the day after President Donald Trump's inauguration.

In an article from *Allure* magazine, author Chantel Morel sat down with Connie Lim to gain a deeper understanding of the lyrics to “Quiet.” In the first verse, MILCK instantly sings the lyrics, “*Put on your face, know your place, shut up and smile, don’t spread your legs...*” and Morel asked MILCK what she meant by the phrase, “*Put on your face.*” MILCK responded, “My sister and I would joke about that. Like, ‘Okay, we gotta put on our faces now.’ I’ve been thinking about this line a lot because I don’t want people to misunderstand and take it as, there is shame in makeup or any of that. It’s about the deeper meaning of putting it on. For example, if someone says something sexually obtrusive I used to just laugh it off. That was me putting on my face. You know, ‘that happy face’” (Connie Lim as quoted in Morel, 2017). In this explanation, MILCK made a strong distinction and clarification. While makeup can certainly play a role in a woman’s life and sexual feminine stereotypes, an unbothered face to abhorrent remarks is just as painful. If a woman shows any facial indications that she is upset or bothered by a remark, she is simply ‘sensitive’ or ‘overreacting.’ Lim, as well as many other American women, could surely relate to this statement. This feminist anthem calls out those who refer to feminists as, “bossy,” or, “bitchy,” or “moody,” and argues that it is not a woman’s job to be smiley and happy all day.

Next, MILCK sings the phrase, “*Know your place.*” When asked why this lyric was added to the song, MILCK responded, “Growing up as a Chinese-American daughter in an immigrant family, there is this conception that males are more important than females and so, I was always told ‘know your place.’ For example, when I was younger I heard from Chinese relatives that women with smaller mouths and bigger eyes are more desirable because women with smaller mouths speak less and they observe more” (Connie Lim as quoted in Morel, 2017). This comment leads to her next lyrics, “Shut up and smile.” MILCK explained, “In that line I was referring to a time when I didn’t know how to defend myself in uncomfortable situations. I



would just smile. I also used to cry a lot. I'm the emotional member of my family. I used to cry, and I think my dad wasn't equipped to understand how to be emotionally sensitive because it's not encouraged upon amongst traditional Chinese culture. So, he would always say, 'Don't cry, don't cry. Be happy.' But that's so, suffocating, especially when I just want to cry. I think we've all been through that" (Connie Lim as quoted in Morel, 2017). As an American-born citizen of the United States, I can only sympathize with MILCK's childhood and the struggles within her cultural background.

At the end of MILCK's first verse, she sings, "*Don't spread your legs.*" When asked about this phrase, MILCK shared, "I remember I was a tomboy when I was younger, and my mom always used to tell me to 'close my legs.' It made me feel as if my pussy was bad, and I had to hide it. The quest to not spread your legs is so charged because it makes us feel that we are vulnerable. But, she also would tell me, 'you have to protect it.' So, from a very young age I was made aware of sexual abuse" (Connie Lim as quoted in Morel, 2017). The notion for females to "not spread their legs" reinforces rape culture and hints that the women "ask for it." Females are labeled as "sluts" and "whores" when in the same discussion as "opening their legs." This notion also hints that if a woman "opens her legs" it's an open invitation for any man to enter for his own sexual pleasure, regardless if there was any consent or not. Headlines will emphasize that *she* was raped because *she* opened her legs, never *he* raped her because *he* could not keep his own genitals in his pants. This is the message that many young women, like MILCK, are receiving on a daily basis, and it is the message that current feminists are fighting against each and every single day.

To spread awareness on gender-based violence, the first "Take Back the Night" march happened in 1976. This event occurred in many cities around the world and ultimately became an

annual event (Napikoski, 2019). According to the Take Back the Night Foundation, their mission reads: “Our Mission as a charitable 501(c)3 Foundation is to end sexual assault, domestic violence, dating violence, sexual abuse and all other forms of sexual violence. We serve to create safe communities and respectful relationships through awareness events and initiatives. People of all backgrounds around the world are taking back their voices by speaking out against these crimes and taking a stand through Take Back the Night. Sexual violence, harassment, abuse, stalking, and trafficking continue in epidemic proportions” (Take Back the Night Foundation, 2019). The Take Back the Night webpage shared that these events have taken place in over 36 countries, and in over 800 communities, and the number continues to grow. Additionally, the organization has reached over 30 million people with their messages of strength, support, and their commitment to end sexual violence. Organizations such as Take Back the Night can use MILCK’s song and lyrics to spread the awareness that those who are sexually assaulted are not alone and that there are people and organizations who can help.

To continue with the lyrics, MILCK’s pre-chorus has three notable phrases to uncover. First, MILCK sings, “*But no one knows me, no one ever will.*” In regard to the meaning behind this lyric, MILCK disclosed, “I remember whenever I was asked what I wanted to be when I grew up, I always had this quiet voice in my head that said, ‘a singer!’ But I was taught that I should be a doctor, or a lawyer—very appropriate Chinese-American immigrant jobs. So, I learned to silence my voice and I learned to question all my natural instincts and that’s become a challenge” (Connie Lim as quoted in Morel, 2017). Too often, people tell young girls what they *should* be, rather than encourage them to be what they *want* to be. Adults are in no place to speak for the youth, nor are they correct in determining the path for the younger generations. If this continues, generations will continue to direct young girls into gendered roles in society. Girls

will feel no personal freedom or personal autonomy over themselves and their futures. No one knows you like you know yourself. Society should not limit the futures of young girls. Active feminists rightfully argue that young girls, and women, should be taught that they can do whatever they set their minds to, and that they will have the support to do so.

MILCK's next line reads, "*If I don't say something, if I just lie still.*" When asked about this lyric, MILCK shared, "I had an abusive boyfriend when I was 14, and I haven't talked about this explicitly, this is the first time publicly. He would break into my room, and he would threaten to yell so my parents see because he made everything out to be my fault. I remember something shifted in me and I went from just a pure innocent woman who loved everything, to someone who just did what he wanted because I had to be safe. I vividly remember one moment, he was drunk throwing stuff around. It's like I was lying still and just letting things happen to me. It's difficult but I wanted to share this. I feel if I do it will empower others, and we can start healing our personal shame, and empower ourselves to be community leaders" (Connie Lim as quoted in Morel, 2017). This explanation represents a woman's numbness to her abuser. There comes a point where the female feels defeated and is manipulated into thinking that her place in the relationship is to stay silent and to abide by the abuser's rules and desires. It is a clear picture of an unhealthy relationship. A well-known sign of an abusive relationship is when the victim's personality shifts and they lose interest in the things that made them happy in the past. MILCK realized that through her song, she could find a voice that could help others recognize the power in their own voices, too. The song resembles a feminist anthem as it also helps women learn that they are not alone, and that together their voices can make a memorable statement to be remembered.

The final lyrics in the pre-chorus read, *“Would I be that monster, scare them all way, if I let them hear what I have to say.”* MILCK explained this section to Morel and said, “When we're really young, the behaviors we absorb get stored in our subconscious. So, if some trauma happens to us as adults our subconscious kicks in and we can repeat the abusive behaviors we once saw. As a survivor of domestic abuse, I feel like I have this monster and abuser stored in me at moments. But it is not my job to keep it in and that's why this verse leads to ‘I can't keep quiet’” (Connie Lim as quoted in Morel, 2017). Women should never feel accountable for the feelings and emotions that are left behind from their abuser. And, if a woman is ever triggered and needs to let out her emotions, she should never be labeled as a ‘bitch,’ or a ‘standoffish,’ rather she is healing and needs time and support. At this point in the song, MILCK breaks out into her chorus where she sings that she can't keep quiet and that she is a one-woman riot. The song inspires women to speak their truths and to stand up for justice. MILCK shows that there is a level of empowerment demonstrated in females when they are taking the courageous step to ensure that their voices are heard for not only themselves, but others, too.

Overall, MILCK's song “Quiet” could not have been released at a more perfect time. MILCK talked with Gil Kaufman, an author for Billboard, and noted that prior to President Trump's election, people were quiet and political conversations were scarce. However, during and after President Trump's campaign, his words of violence towards women, such as his famous quote, “grab her by the pussy,” triggered many victims who MILCK wanted to defend. MILCK proudly told Kaufman (2017) that the Women's March was a beacon of light and hope for people to do something positive. Her flash mob performance gained the attention it deserved. MILCK launched a project to collect stories about everyday people who have braved extraordinary distances to speak up, and to speak out. She posted those stories to the

#ICAN'TKEEPQUIET website and donated 20 percent of the proceeds from the merchandise sales to the Los Angeles chapter of Step Up, a nonprofit that provides after school and mentorship programs for underprivileged girls ages 13-18 (Kaufman, 2017). MILCK is a feminist icon of this decade and continues to inspire girls and women of all ages to speak their truths for all to hear, loud and clear. As typical of a feminist anthem artist, MILCK seeks to rally listeners to promote messages for the greater good and to promote unity under a common theme and experience.

### **Conclusion:**

In conclusion, feminist anthems carry many themes and powerful messages. To summarize, “Quiet” by MILCK’s three thematic takeaways are sexual assault awareness, courage and unity. MILCK helps give her listeners a voice who may not realize they can have one. “Quiet” allows listeners to relate to the message and to know that they are not alone in their experiences with rape, sexual assault or sexual harassment. “Sam Jones Blues” by Bessie Smith’s three thematic takeaways are independence, confidence, and self-worth. The lyrics in the song can relate to women who feel the need to leave a relationship or marriage. Bessie Smith gives women motivation to recognize their own power and their own worth to sustain in a society without a husband. “Sam Jones Blues” was a radical song for its time and serves as a feminist anthem as it sends women a powerful message about female independence in society and that a woman does not need a man to be happy and successful in life. “The Pill” by Loretta Lynn’s three thematic takeaways are sexual freedom, female autonomy, and the act of a woman entering into the public sphere. Prior to the 1970s, the female role was often played in the home, also known as the private sphere. The husband would enter into the public sphere as a means to leave the home and to serve as the breadwinner for the family. But, once women received access

to the pill, they were given the chance to live their lives without fear of pregnancy. Thus, this allowed them more sexual freedom and more say over their bodies. The birth control pill gave women the opportunity to put the pregnancies on hold and to obtain an education or career. “The Pill” is a feminist anthem as it praises and highlights a woman’s ability to leave the home and to capitalize on their freedom in the public sphere.

To continue, “I Am Woman” by Helen Reddy’s three thematic takeaways are empowerment, triumph, and a timeless classic. “I Am Woman” empowers women to recognize that no one can bring them down unless they let them. Systematic oppression cannot tear women down or apart from each other, men cannot bring women down, and laws that govern women’s roles in society can’t stop them from succeeding either. The song is triumphant as it tells the story of where women started and where women are going. The oppression that women endured over the years will only make them stronger in the future. We, as women, have learned so much about ourselves as well as what is right and wrong with the world, so now we have all of these stories to share with future generations. “I Am Woman” serves as a timeless feminist anthem because since the time the song was released and now, women around the world are able to realize what they want and what they deserve, which can ultimately fuel further feminist movements. And lastly, “9 to 5” by Dolly Parton’s three thematic takeaways are systematic oppression, workplace harassment, and a demand for equality. “9 to 5” did a great job highlighting the struggles that female workers, especially secretaries, dealt with during the workday. The treatment was poor and unfair, and women were rarely rewarded for their own work and ideas. “9 to 5” was revolutionary because it showed men that the women realized that the workplace environment was not right and that it needed to change. Dolly Parton was not sitting back and staying quiet any longer, and nor should anyone else. “9 to 5” serves as a

powerful feminist anthem as it exposed harassment within the workplace and the demand for recognition and equality for the same work.

Feminist anthems are important to our society, and our world as a whole, as they highlight stories, struggles, and experiences of women so that listeners can relate to the messages and to unite as one. Some have positive messages, others have saddening truths; however, any exposure or attention can help spread the underlying messages within the lyrics across a variety of people and populations. Ideally, listeners will pay attention to the lyrics and not simply mindlessly learn the words just because they enjoy the beat of the song. But, even if listeners mindlessly listen, those messages can be stored in their subconscious, thus possibly altering internal biases among people. Overall, in today's era it does not seem like feminist anthems will be dying down anytime soon, and we can expect to hear some more untold truths and inspiring messages that can continue to unify women across the globe.

## Annotated Bibliography

### **Books:**

Dubois, E., and Dumenil, L. (2016). *Through Women's Eyes: An American History with Documents (Third Edition)* ISBN: 978-1-319-04913-3.

Dubois and Dumenil's textbook was used in the course titled, "U.S. Women's History." This textbook served as a great source to learn about what was going on in U.S. women's history during the times of each song. The events occurring in each time period can help us recognize the meanings behind lyrics and messages in the songs. This text especially helped when analyzing the song, "The Pill," by Loretta Lynn.

Eyerman, Ron. "Music and social movements: mobilizing traditions in the twentieth century." Cambridge England; Cambridge University Press, 1998.

The author, Ron Eyerman, wrote seven chapters that could help aid in the capstone project. The chapters include content on the following: social movements and culture; traditions; alternative popular cultures; the movements of Black music; politics and music in the 1960s; content from the sixties to the nineties; and structures of feelings and cognitive praxis. This source could help understand why songs were being written in each decade, for example, what was going on in society that motivated the lyrics.

### **Scholarly Articles:**

Arrow, M. (2007). 'It Has Become My Personal Anthem': 'I Am Woman,' Popular Culture and 1970s Feminism. *Australian Feminist Studies*, 22(53), 213-230.  
doi:10.1080/08164640701361774

A strong, and widely-known, feminist anthem from the 1970s was 'I Am Woman' by Helen Reddy. This source followed a narrative from a female listener to this song and demonstrated the importance and significance of the song's lyrics during the 1970s. The article presented the song's powerful message of female empowerment. The source also shared how the song affected Helen Reddy as an individual, as well as how it impacted society at that time.

Eyerman, Ron. (2002). Music in movement: Cultural politics and old and new social movements. *Qualitative Sociology* 25 (3): 443-458.

Ron Eyerman provided insight to music in social movements in Michelle Arrow's article above. Eyerman taught his readers that music in social movements can articulate and foster a sense of group belonging; make the group visible to others; assist in recruitment



to the cause; create a sense of continuity; and ‘permit the presentation of the collective’s view of events free from the censorship of the dominant culture.’

### **Correspondence:**

Hannah. 2006. E-mail to author, 12 January.

Joan. 2006. Email to author, 13 January.

### **Online Sources/Magazines:**

Blair, E. (2019, January 14). A Song Called 'Quiet' Struck A Chord With Women. Two Years Later, It's Still Ringing. Retrieved February 12, 2019, from <https://www.npr.org/2019/01/14/683694934/milck-quiet-womens-march-american-anthem>

The author, Elizabeth Blair, addressed the origin and significance of MILCK’s feminist anthem, “Quiet.” She explained that the song caught fire overnight and became a global anthem for victims of sexual harassment and abuse. Then came the 2016 presidential election. The artist explained her thought process behind the creation of the song, and also explained what she wanted to do after the song was released. In this article, we learned that the artist channeled her rage into an idea to teach the song to other singers and perform it at the Women's March in Washington, D.C., the day after President Trump's inauguration.

Bologna, C. (2016, December 05). 17 Feminist Songs That Were Ahead Of Their Time. Retrieved February 12, 2019, from [https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/17-feminist-songs-that-were-ahead-of-their-time\\_us\\_56fc6b46e4b0daf53aeeaf5a](https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/17-feminist-songs-that-were-ahead-of-their-time_us_56fc6b46e4b0daf53aeeaf5a)

The author, Caroline Bologna, provided lyrical breakdowns, analytics, and explanations for some of the most progressive feminist songs throughout the eras. Not only does this source provide explanations to the songs, but it also provides the music video, too. This source helped build a timeline of songs for the capstone project.

Davis, A. Y. (1998). Blues Legacies and Black Feminism: Gertrude "Ma" Rainey, Bessie Smith, and Billie Holiday. Retrieved March 4, 2019, from <http://movies2.nytimes.com/books/first/d/davis-blues.html>

The author, Angela Davis, provided information on the blues genre, as well as powerful Black feminist women in the early 1900s. Davis explained the common themes of blues and introduced both Gertrude Rainey and Bessie Smith’s styles of music. Themes of love and sexuality were talked about, as well as the ways blues feminist music challenged societal social norms at the time.

Kaufman, G. (2017, January 28). 'Quiet' Singer MILCK on Huge Reaction to Her Women's March Anthem: 'I Feel Like I'm Dreaming'. Retrieved February 12, 2019, from <https://www.billboard.com/articles/columns/pop/7669907/quiet-milck-connie-lim-womens-march-anthem-interview>

The author, Gil Kaufman, took a look into MILCK's background and motivation for her song, "Quiet." Kaufman explained that the 30-year-old singer/songwriter spent nearly a decade trying to break into the music business with varying levels of success, but her "creative dam" busted open when she unlocked the raw feelings about the trauma of domestic violence and anorexia she suffered as a 14-year-old.

Morel, C. (2017, May 26). Singer MILCK Shares The Deeper Meaning Behind the Viral Anthem for the Women's March. Retrieved February 12, 2019, from <https://www.allure.com/story/milck-womens-march-anthem>

The author, Chantel Morel, shared that MILCK is a survivor of domestic violence, depression, and anorexia. In this article, we learned about MILCK's background and start at an open mic in Los Angeles. It was important to learn that this venue was an intimate open mic with a crowd that embraced diversity. It was a place where MILCK felt safe. Morel expressed that MILCK's song, "Quiet," became the unofficial anthem of the Women's March.

Napikoski, L. (2019, January 08). 1970s Feminism Timeline. *ThoughtCo*. Retrieved March 7, 2019, from <https://www.thoughtco.com/1970s-feminism-timeline-3528911>

Linda Napikoski provided a detailed rundown of radical and historic moments in the 1970s that pertained to women's rights. Each decade had one-to-three facts about either a court case, a piece of legislation, or an initiation that was a result from equal rights. This article helped understand why Loretta Lynn and Helen Reddy may have used certain lyrics and messages within their songs that were released in the 1970s.

NPR. (n.d.). American Anthem. Retrieved February 12, 2019, from <https://www.npr.org/series/622671774/american-anthem>

This source follows NPR's American anthem series. This is a basic foundational source that produces numerous articles focused on anthems. Anthems focus on various themes such as feminist themes, Black themes, LGBTQ themes, ableism themes, etc. Along with written articles, NPR provided audio options, too.

Shapiro, J. (2019, January 22). For Many With Disabilities, 'Let It Go' Is An Anthem Of Acceptance. Retrieved February 12, 2019, from

<https://www.npr.org/2019/01/22/686690655/frozen-let-it-go-disabilities-american-anthem>

The author, Joseph Shapiro, took part in NPR's American anthem series with the song, "Let it Go," from Disney's *Frozen*. This was an anthem for various minority groups. Shapiro shared that groups such as LGBTQ+ persons, disabled persons, people in prisons, people with eating disorders, and people with addiction identified with Elsa, a queen who learned to shed her shame and accept the things that make her different.

Stubblebine, A. (2018, January 13). 25 Top Feminist Anthems. Retrieved February 12, 2019, from <https://www.billboard.com/articles/news/pride/8022687/top-feminist-anthems-songs>

The author, Allison Stubblebine, provided a list of well-known songs with feminist messages. Stubblebine expressed that feminist anthems call in all shapes and sizes, from the riot grrrl hard-hitters to pop radio chart-toppers. In celebration of empowering women, *Billboard* put together 25 feminist anthems. This list helped create a timeline of feminist songs throughout the decades.

Take Back the Night Foundation. (2019). History of Take Back the Night. Retrieved from <https://takebackthenight.org/about-us/>

The Take Back the Night Foundation provided its viewers a history and background of the event. The webpage clearly identified the history of the event, the history and background of the foundation, the foundation's mission, and current statistics. This webpage was helpful when talking about MILCK's "Quiet," and discussing examples of gender-based violence and what organizations help with gender-based violence.

Thompson, S. (2014, April 03). The Good Listener: What Makes An Anthem? Retrieved February 12, 2019, from <https://www.npr.org/sections/allsongs/2014/04/03/297296270/the-good-listener-what-makes-an-anthem>

The author, Stephen Thompson, asked the question of what makes an anthem. He recognized and assumed that many anthem writers would love to transcend generations and eras and divisions between people, and to craft a song suitable for anyone and everyone to shout from the rooftops, blare at parades and sporting events and rallies, and otherwise incorporate into the fabric of their existence. Thompson believed that true anthems are part of a shared experience.

Traister, R. (2015, May 14). If You Want to See What Revolutionary Workplace Policies Really Look Like, Watch '9 to 5'. *The New Republic*. Retrieved March 1, 2019, from <https://newrepublic.com/article/121785/enduring-relevance-9-5>

Rebecca Traister highlights the history, as well as the current relevancy, of Dolly Parton's Grammy award-winning song "9 to 5." The author talks about the Second wave feminism, sexual harassment, and the gender pay gap. Traister also hinted that the song was an anthem for her and her female colleagues who felt underpaid and underappreciated in their workplace.

West Virginia University Athletics. (2019). Take Me Home Country Roads. Retrieved February 12, 2019, from <https://wvusports.com/sports/2017/8/2/country-roads.aspx?id=4>

The source for this article is West Virginia University Athletics. This write-up comes from the 'Sports Theme Songs/Anthems History and Background' section under the West Virginia University Athletics page. This example helped show that anthems come in all shapes and sizes, whether it be a Billboard chart-topping song, or a song that is sung at sporting event games. Take Me Home Country Roads continues to show unity and pride.

### **Movies/Documentaries:**

Higgins, C. (Director). (1980). *9 to 5* [Motion picture on Hulu]. United States: 20th Century Fox.

The major motion picture, *9 to 5*, followed three female employees during the 1980s. The film demonstrated how the male boss, Hart, exploited and mistreated his female subordinates. He used sexist remarks, took credit for the females' ideas, yelled and threatened to fire his employees, and sexually harassed one of his female employees, too. This film goes hand-in-hand with Dolly Parton's well-known 1980s song, "9 to 5."

### **Song Lyrics:**

Allen, L., McHan, D., Bayless, T., & Lynn, L. (1972). The Pill [Recorded by L. Lynn]. On *MCA Records* [CD]. Bradley's Barn, Mt. Juliet: Owen Bradley.

This source presented the lyrics to Loretta Lynn's song, "The Pill."

Burton, R. (1972). I Am Woman [Recorded by H. Reddy]. On *Capitol Studios* [CD]. Jay Senter.

This source presented the lyrics to Helen Reddy's song, "I Am Woman."

Lim, C., & Gonzalez, A. (2015). Quiet [Recorded by MILCK]. On *Atlantic Records* [CD].

This source presented the lyrics to Connie Lim's (MILCK) song, "Quiet."

Parton, D. (1980). 9 to 5. On *RCA Studios* [CD]. Nashville: Gregg Perry.

This source presented the lyrics to Dolly Parton's song, "9 to 5."

Sam Jones Blues [CD, Recorded by B. Smith]. (1923).

This source presented the lyrics to Bessie Smith's song, "Sam Jones Blues."